

Chef Alex Hitz on Organic Eating, and Why He'd Bring Salt to a Desert Island



Alex Hitz., By Deborah Whitlaw Llewellyn.

Alex Hitz is the creator of the gourmet frozen-food line Beverly Hills Kitchen. He has appeared on QVC and HSN, where his show earned the No. 1 slot in the kitchen-and-food category. Hitz is also a prominent New York man-about-town and philanthropist, with home bases also in L.A. and in Atlanta, his birthplace. His first cookbook, *My Beverly Hills Kitchen*, will be released this month. To prepare for this interview, the author made a batch of Hitz's Best Ever Brownies from the book. Copious amounts of butter, sugar, and salt later, she was left with "dense, delicious squares" of "rich and goo-ily textured" chocolate. She spoke to Hitz earlier this fall.

Flora Collins: You say in *My Beverly Hills Kitchen* that you went to cooking school after college. Did any class or major influence this decision?

Alex Hitz: I had finished a graduate course in Paris and really wanted to stay. I had always loved food and cooking. Le Cordon Bleu had classes that were starting the next week, so I stayed! It turned out to be one of the very best things I ever did.

Many students use baking or cooking as a stress reliever. Do you think you do or did?

Absolutely. I did and do. I disconnect from everything except making the dishes I am making as close to perfect as possible. It's very therapeutic.

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You add a ton of salt to your recipes. Explain this.

If I were on a desert island, salt is the one thing I would want. It can make bad dishes good and good dishes great. It's essential in sweets as a balance and brightener to the sugar. Never, ever be afraid of salt.

Cooking was obviously always a passion of yours. As a teenager, did you ever think you would pursue it professionally?

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I never imagined it, but lots of things change from the time you're a teenager to an adult. I used to think I wanted to work on Wall Street and am so glad I never did it—I would have been really bad at it!

What advice would you give those who want to work in the food industry when they're older?

Immediately go to an excellent cooking school, and then work for a good chef. You'll see very quickly if it's for you or not. I think it's in one's DNA, but you have to be exposed to on-the-job training to really know if you want to pursue it.

How concerned are you with the "green" movement or organic eating?

I certainly appreciate it, and always try to use the very best ingredients possible, but a word to the wise: don't believe everything you read . . .

What advice would you give to the busy high schooler or college student about maintaining a healthy diet? Do you have any suggestions for meals that are nutritious and delicious but take only a few minutes to prepare?

Stay away from junk. It's really hard, as our culture is inundated with it, but also beware of what are billed as "healthy" snacks. They can be full of sugar. Stay away from too much sugar—even though an occasional dessert splurge is so great—but eat what you like. The best advice I can give you is to keep your portions reasonable, and don't deny yourself of something you love—just keep it small.

What's your favorite meal? To eat? To cook?

Chicken potpie, hands down. It's magic!